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Realities of Climate Change with the Emphasis of its Impact on Human Life in *Flight*

*Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver

### **Abstract**

The ecosystem is formulated by the interconnectedness labyrinth of human and non-human entities. These living entities are interdependent on the space around them. A minute change in the ecosystem could make a huge difference in the inherent lifestyle of living entities. This novel can be taken as an attempt to bring forth the idea of eco consciousness achieved through realizing the reality of amazing connectivity among human non human and the Mother Nature. The protagonist Dellarobia witnesses this connectivity when everything starts to fall apart. She could see how a slight climate change stirs a drastic change in the inherent life of monarch butterflies. Her empathy towards the butterflies made her to feel oneness with those butterflies. This oneness informs her the reality of climate change and its effect on the human and non human entities. Following these footsteps she finds herself in the light of truth that is the ecosystem is nothing but the labyrinth of human and non human entities that is highly interdependent among themselves and also with the space around it. The novel clearly throws light on the coexistence of nature of human could only be achieved by the moving towards the

idea of ecoconsciousness. As the protagonist finds out their biological space is not only related to their cultural identity but a way to move forward for a better lifestyle, she determined to take her life towards it. The conscious identity provides a moral spirit and force to fight against the self to mould her life. *Flight Behavior* is an unconventional novel about the relationship between the people and the land they inhabit. It also highlights the cautionary warning to mankind that exploitation of nature over a period of time will lead to the disruption in the mankind.

Keywords: interconnectedness, interdependent, labyrinth, ecoconsciousness, coexistence

“In wildness is the preservation of the world”-Henry David Thoreau.

Climate is the core element of the novel through which Kingsolver emphasis on the idea of ecological consciousness and interconnection with nature. Throughout the novel the author has single handedly portrayed the coexistence of nature and human being, parallel to it the adverse effects of manmade ecological disaster has been brought out.

The climate change causes the monarchs to change their flight pattern. Mostly the reason for this change is clearly man made which is given through the line, “he said no one completely understood how they made these migrations. Hundreds of factors came into play. Fire ants, for example, had now come into Texas, where the monarchs are vulnerable. Ants ate the caterpillars. And the farm chemicals were killing the milkweed plants, another worry he mentioned” (147). Here the dependence among creatures and their interconnection with nature has given clearly. The problem of manmade chemicals and the importance of moving towards organic farming has been insisted through these lines.

The setting plays an important role in the plot and also in the lives of the characters. The landscape is visualized in a great deal to convey the idea of human dependence of nature and they are a just a part of immense pattern. As Barry Commoner's first law of ecology - "Everything is connected with everything else" (Glottfelty xiv), the lives of all the human and non human being is interlinked with nature like a giant web. He cannot cut himself from that intricate pattern. Further the novel conveys how the connection with nature is an integral element for human to understand themselves and their relationship with others as well. The inevitable link between the climate change and its impact on human life is clearly portrayed in the novel.

The regional ecosystem and its peculiarities are describes as one of the major characteristic of the novel. It captures the livelihood of a farming community that depends on nature and also it adheres to the ecocentric lifestyle that has been long forgotten in the urban areas. The characters exhibits a brilliant observation of the natural cycles of Appalachian mountain region. Ecoconsciousness reflects the sensitivity to the natural cycles of life. Here in this novel too the traditional inherent wisdom like instinctive knowledge about the seasonal patterns is clearly bring forth.

The arrival of butterflies to Appalachian region brought many positive and negative changes to the lives of human beings. The author has given the different perspectives of different characters. The immigrant family from Mexico found that as a disaster in their livelihood. Because they cannot carry on their job as a tour guide for the people who comes to Mexico in that particular season to see those amazing monarch butterflies. Dellarobia started to change her life from a tedious housewife to an assistant of the scientist Ovid Byron.

Other character also have shown their concern for nature and other fellow beings. Hester's compassion for other small creatures can be seen after the arrival of butterflies. In

the beginning she thought that she could use the arrival of monarchs in their land as an opportunity to earn money by collecting ticket money from the spectators who come to view them. However when she comes to know that her husband is going to do logging in their land she cannot see the destruction of the home of monarchs. Even though she cannot go against her husband she do express her feelings to Dellarobia and this shows her concern for other fellow beings. Also this clearly portrays the idea of ecofeminism that the female cannot stand the destruction of nature.

The community believes the arrival of butterflies as a sign of resurrection or rebirth. Some people like Bear thought that as an annoyance as he wanted to make profit by logging as the arrival of the butterflies made the region to come under the lime light of media. The character Bear represent the people who are never bothered to think about nature and its importance. It is through this false conception of ownership of land, that humans have destroyed the environment, and strayed from their natural role in the ecosystem. This makes the ecosystem to become unbalance and devoid of natural resources. For nature lovers that was become an opportunity to protest against the logging. For Ovid Byron that is as a sign of climate change.

It is the mixture of the landscape and the internal mindscape that predominates in the novel. Kingsolver has written picturesque passages that throws light on the invisible relationship of human being and nature. The lives of the characters are always in a sync with the nature and especially with monarchs. Here by making this untold connection the author has tries to portray the interconnectedness of human world with the natural being. In the beginning of the novel, the protagonist explains her feelings as she was on her way the mountain to start an affair with a neighbor. The novel is in third person narration so that it provides access to the inner thoughts of the characters. The desperation abide in her as a

tedious housewife is explained through her empathy towards the plants and animals that she see around her.

The sheep in the field below, the Turnbow family land, the white frame house she had not slept outside for a single night in ten-plus years of marriage: that was pretty much it. ... Apparently, today was the day she walked out of the picture. Distinguishing herself from the luckless sheep that stood down there in the mud surrounded by the deep stiletto holes of their footprints, enduring life's bad deals. ... Life was just one long proposition they never saw coming. Their pasture looked drowned. In the next field over, the orchard painstakingly planted by the neighbours last year was now dying under the rain. (2-3).

She felt an intimacy with her land. She could understand its language and voice. She feels solace and safety in that environment. She could easily relate herself to the environment and feels oneness to it. That is why she was able to feel the aim and practical difficulties of monarch butterflies when they lost its seasonal habitat in the hands of climate change. Her understanding of those small creatures are brought out through the lines:

“Not just an orange passage across a continent as she'd imagined it before, not like marbles rolling from one end of a box to the other and back. This was a living flow, like a pulse through veins, with the cells bursting and renewing themselves as they went. The sudden vision filled her with strong emotions that embarrassed her, for fear of breaking into sobs as she had in front of her in laws that day when the butterflies envelopes her. How was that even normal, to cry over insects?”(146).

The arrival of butterflies reflects the perspectives of different characters in the novel. But this change of flight behavior had a deep sync or an impacts in the life of protagonist. The central character in the novel rediscovers nature and also reestablish her natural role. The

meaningful relationship with nature helps one to rediscover. The relationship of the characters with their land helps them to rediscover themselves and also to understand others.

The protagonist was bored with her monotonous lifestyle. She has a nonfunctional relationship with her husband and seek something more lively and interesting after the arrival of butterflies, on the mountain near her house, caused enormous changes inner life. After that she started to redefine her own life and found freedom by breaking her walls of routine. Before that she was into the path of self destruction and once the connection has made she realized that her life and problems are small in front of the huge nature. After the encounter of these butterflies “she paled at the size her foolishness had attained, how large and crowded and devoid of any structural beams. It could be flattened like a circus tent” (15).

She rediscover herself and also make an intimate connection with others when they are consciously connected with nature. Exploring the natural world through science has given her courage to confront unbearable and unpleasant relationships. She was almost in the path of self-destruction as she cannot get an opportunity to express her talents and feelings. She reflects self confidence in the presence of nature.

The change of flight behavior from Mexico to Appalachian Mountain in America reflects the changes in the life of Dellarobia. The author links Dellarobia’s desire to escape her poverty and a disappointing marriage to the butterflies’ even more desperate escape from a habitat no longer suitable to their biological requirement. She made many bold decisions after the arrival of monarchs they made her life to become a bold woman from a tired housewife. It gives a correct path to make her wings to fly. Symbolically here her flight behavior has also been changed. Everyone thought that the Monarchs are going to extinct. Even the scientist Ovid Byron also was not sure of its survival capacity. He wanted the monarchs to survive but he was not sure of it. But the only person who believed the survival

instinct of the butterflies is Dellarobia. As she was consciously connected with it, it was possible for her to connect her rebirth as an individual woman with the monarch's survival in the inhospitable climate conditions. She knew that she was going to make a rebirth to become an independent woman. Likewise she also knew about the successful survival of the butterflies. The novel shows the invisible and yet invincible link of the human mind and nature. The ecologically conscious mind is interdependent and interrelated to its environment. Even other characters shows the interdependence with the nature. The people in the community is dependent to the nature and other animals like sheep for its livelihood.

She started to change her course of actions after the encounter of monarch butterflies. She started to work for Ovid Byron and in this process she comes to know about her intelligence and talents. After this exposure she became a confident woman and shows change in the relationships with her husband and mother in law. Kingsolver has given the maturity of Dellarobia rises into a higher level after the arrival of monarchs. On the one hand she thought the butterflies are miracle and beautiful to admire. On the other hand she has to accept the seriousness of the environmental issue that has been posed in front of her. She also established a new relationship with her problematic mother in law. The author described the change of events in her life as:

Her mother-in-law basically hates her and lets her know that. So she's -- she has this sweet husband Cub, as dumb as a box of rocks, and she just has no -- and she's taking care of her two little kids whom she loves dearly. But this is just -- she spends her life with people who rolled plastic trucks on the floor. And she sees nothing else ahead of her. And so what happens when she discovers this miracle is that somehow she -- well, through surprising events, she becomes sort of -- this miracle is a tribute to her in the global media and she becomes of [sic] our Lady of the Butterflies (5).



The small amount of income from her job as an assistant of Ovid Byron made her to become financially independent. She started to lead a different life. She took care of her children throughout the day without any rest. Even when she was asked questions in the interview of her vision about butterflies, her part of mind was thinking about her small child's safety. She was mentally filled with the household duties and the children. The author has clearly brought forth the inner thoughts of a typical household lady having two small kids. However the exposure made her to realize her place in the world. She started to think that she has a life apart from the family and kids. The change of her attitude towards the life and duties are described brilliantly as,

If her kids wanted to pull everything out of the laundry basket to make a bird's nest and sit in it, fine. Dellarobia could even sit in there with them and incubate, if she so desired. Household chores no longer called her name exclusively. She had an income. She'd never before understood how much her life in this little house had felt to her like confinement in a sinking vehicle after driving off a bridge...To open a hatch and swim away felt miraculous (286).

The social role or a natural role can only be seen by understanding their role in the ecosystem as one of the part of immense pattern. By the end of novel this is portrayed through the character of Dellarobia.

"The sky was too bright and the ground so unreliable, she couldn't look up for very long. Instead her eyes held steady on the fire bursts of wings reflected across the water, a merging of flame and flood. Above the lake of the world, flanked by White Mountains, they flew out to a new earth" (432).

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